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Armaments and the "Next War"

by  
John W. Foster

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# Armaments and the "Next War."

THE OPENING ADDRESS AT THE  
TWELFTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
ON INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATION,  
HELD AT MOHONK  
LAKE, N. Y., MAY 30, 1906.

BY  
JOHN W. FOSTER,  
*President of the Conference.*

NOTE.—The opening address of the President of the recent Mohonk Conference on International Arbitration has occasioned considerable comment. Owing to its imperfect publication in the press, some of the comments have been misleading. For this reason, and because of the desire expressed by many friends for its full publication, it is herewith reproduced.

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

*June, 1906.*

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TWELFTH ANNUAL MOHONK CONFERENCE  
ON  
INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATION.

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OPENING ADDRESS by PRESIDENT JOHN W. FOSTER.

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

We congratulate ourselves on the assembling of the twelfth annual Conference on International Arbitration today with the reign of peace among all the nations of the earth. At former meetings there have been in progress the Japanese-Chinese and the Spanish-American wars, the Philippine insurrection, the Boer war, the Boxer outbreak in China, the British expedition to Tibet, and the great Russo-Japanese war. The temple of Janus now stands closed. Let us hope its votaries may have no occasion to open it in our day.

The hopeful promise now is, not only that peace reigns, but that the nations are striving to preserve peace. The third meeting of the American States is about to occur at Rio de Janeiro to concert measures for greater harmony in their work of developing commerce, industry, intelligence and justice. And it is proposed that this assembly in the Western Hemisphere shall be followed soon by another Conference of all

the nations of the world at The Hague in the interest of peace and humanity. The gratifying feature of this second Conference in Europe is that it is responded to with alacrity by all the governments, in striking contrast with the hesitation and jealousy which marked the first convocation. Another interesting feature is that while twenty-six governments were represented at the Conference of 1899, forty-seven have been invited to participate in the second Peace Conference, including all the American States and Ethiopia. It will be the first time in the history of the human race when all the independent nations have come together to confer on their mutual interests. Verily the world is moving on towards the era of peace and good will among men.

With this inspiring picture before us, I regret to have to direct your attention to another phase of the coming World's Congress which is not so encouraging. The main object of the first Hague Conference was expressly set forth in the program to be the limitation of the armaments of the nations. Of late the Emperor of Russia has been the subject of severe criticism, and even of malediction. I am pleased to say that too much praise cannot be bestowed upon his rescript convoking the Conference of 1899. No more forcible statement has ever been published of the economic evils of war and of the unwisdom and hurtful effects of the maintenance of the vast armies and navies of the great powers of Europe. I have no doubt that the Czar at that time sincerely desired that a limitation might be placed upon these extravagant and dangerous expenditures, but the Conference did not have the courage or the will to meet this mighty

issue. We have the authority of one of the prominent members of that body, Baron d'Estournelles de Constant, for the statement made recently in the French Senate, that the Conference in "its first purpose had failed.

\* \* \* But all was not lost. \* \* \* From fear of offending public opinion and lest it end in complete failure, the permanent arbitration court was created, and in spite of the tacit dislike which at first crippled it, it has begun to live. \* \* \* On the initiative of President Roosevelt, the Hague Court, boycotted by Europe, was set on its feet and saved."

Happily the boycott of Europe did not extend to America, and M. de Constant justly gives the credit to President Roosevelt for having saved the Conference from complete failure. However great may be the other services of our President to his country and mankind, I believe that history will record this act as his worthiest claim to lasting fame.

The first call for the second Peace Conference was issued during the progress of the Russo-Japanese war by President Roosevelt, but after its close the Emperor of Russia asked and was accorded the privilege of sending out the formal convocation. The discouraging feature of it to which I have alluded is that in the program of subjects to be considered the limitation of armaments has not been included. It was hardly to be expected that this measure would be suggested by the power whose armies so recently had been driven from the field and its navy annihilated. But it is of equal importance with the general acceptance of the principle of arbitration that some measure shall be adopted to put a stop to this ever increasing competition of the great powers in the enlargement of their

standing armies and navies. It is a mockery of sincerity and consistency to solemnly enter into treaty compacts for the settlement of international disputes by peaceful arbitration, while the high contracting parties continue to strain to the utmost their taxing capacity and their credit in preparations for war.

I recognize that the limitation of armaments is encompassed with many difficulties, but it is no more impossible of realization than a general arbitration treaty seemed a few years ago. Nor are we without examples to show that it is possible of practical application. The two southernmost republics of this hemisphere for a generation or more regarded each other as natural enemies, and they taxed their people to the stretch of endurance to keep their armies and navies on a war footing. But finally, realizing the folly and wickedness of such a policy, they recently entered into a treaty of amity and disarmament, they have reduced their military forces to police necessities, and sold their battleships and cruisers, or converted them into merchant vessels. Thus Chile and Argentina by disarmament guarantee each other's peace and autonomy. At the close of the war of 1812 the United States and Great Britain agreed to a disarmament of their large naval establishments on the Great Lakes, where fierce conflicts had taken place. A treaty fixed the limit of their armed vessels on those extensive internal seas, and for nearly a century we and our Canadian neighbors have lived in peace, and the immense commercial shipping of those waters has felt no need of vessels of war to protect it. What the Argentine and Chilean republics and the two great



Anglo-Saxon nations have done is feasible for all the nations soon to assemble at The Hague.

The subject which Russia did not feel warranted in suggesting, I am confident will be inserted in the program. In fact it has already been anticipated by President Roosevelt, by the reference he made in his last annual message to "the limitation of the armed forces on land and sea, and of military budgets" as one of the matters of business undisposed of in 1899 and desirable to be considered in the new Conference. The omission has also attracted the attention of the British government, and during the present month a resolution has been adopted by the House of Commons calling for the inclusion of the question.

I earnestly hope our Government will follow up the indication made in the message of the President, and that its delegates to The Hague will take the lead in bringing about an agreement among the great powers for a limitation and, if possible, a reduction in armaments. But I do not lose sight of the fact that even in our own country the proposition does not meet with universal favor, that there is abroad in this land a chauvanistic spirit of militarism, and a disposition to belittle the efforts of the friends of peace. So intelligent a person as he who now honors the post of secretary of the navy, is reported as saying in a recent address that peace societies have never improved the conditions under which war is waged, and that the increased humanity of warfare has come about through the efforts of warriors. He seems to have forgotten that Grotius, the author of *De Jure Belli et Pacis*—a work which more than any other has reformed the excesses of war—was a divine, a jurist, and the greatest

modern apostle of peace; also that when it became necessary to frame a code for the government of the armies of the United States during the Civil War, which would respond to the highest humanitarian sentiments of the age, President Lincoln entrusted the task, not to a warrior, but to a college professor and a sociologist, Dr. Lieber.

We have the following gloomy view of the state of the country from Senator Hale, the veteran statesman and experienced chairman of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, uttered a few weeks ago: "The trouble is, Mr. President, that under the incitement that the military sentiment is constantly pushing us forward to, with every officer of the Army and Navy eager and anxious for a complication that will bring us into war, the public attention is drifting away from the tremendous problems that at home are clutching at the foundations of our entire social, business and political fabric."\* The War and Navy Departments are constantly appealing to Congress for increased appropriations to put them in proper condition for war. The lately retired Commanding General of the Army has announced in a public address that we must prepare ourselves for the next war, and a prominent Admiral of the Navy goes so far as to indicate the nation which is to be our next antagonist.

Why this constant harping on the "next war," when there is no human probability of having one? If we attend to our own business and allow other nations to attend to theirs, there will be no occasion for armed conflicts on our part. I do not believe in "the White

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\*Congressional Record, Vol. 40, No 25, p. 1100, January 16, 1906.

man's burden," in the sense indicated by the jingo British poet, the author of the phrase. Our mission as a people, living in security on this continent, separated by wide oceans from any other great military power, is to maintain here a model republican government and democratic institutions which shall stand as a beacon of hope for the oppressed of all countries, to develop our marvelous resources, to encourage commerce, industries, and intelligence, and by our example promote peace and justice among mankind.

Since the war of 1812, for nearly a century we have been free from the aggressions of any power. Our two foreign wars in that period of time have been provoked by us with weak and almost defenseless nations, and might with honor to ourselves have been avoided. There never was less danger than today of the American Union being exposed to the unfriendly or hostile action of other nations. Why then should we enter into the competition of the great powers of Europe for standing armies and formidable navies? A century and a half ago, when Europe was indulging in the Seven Years' War, Montesquieu, a philosopher a hundred and fifty years ahead of his time, wrote of the armaments of that day, which he describes as "a new disease spread throughout Europe \* \* \* which becomes infectious, for as soon as one state increases its forces the others at once increase theirs; so that nothing is gained by it except general ruin, \* \* \*

And this struggle of all against all is called peace!"

How little have the rulers of our day profited by the lessons of history. The late secretary of the navy advocated the increase of the American navy to an equal place with the most formidable sea power of the world.

Great Britain launches the *Dreadnaught*, and Congress is immediately besieged and implored to appropriate the millions necessary to build a larger and more destructive monster. France follows in the same direction, and Germany sets her builders at work to eclipse all others. It is high time the peace-loving people of America should call a halt in our naval expenditures. We have the authoritative statement of the Chairman of the Committee on Appropriations of the present Congress, made in the House only a few days ago, \*that the appropriations for the navy by the two last Congresses amounted to \$388,108,715, or more than twice as much as it would cost to build the Panama Canal; that we are expending for the current fiscal year \$375,659,719 for military purposes, or sixty-four per cent of the total expenses of the government; and that as a consequence no appropriations can be made for the necessary demands of commerce in river and harbor improvements and for public buildings, or the people must have new taxes levied upon them to meet these enormous war expenditures. Such being the issue, the discussion of the limitation of our armament is likely to pass from the peace societies to the over-burdened taxpayers. Our legislators who have been deaf to the appeals of the friends of peace and arbitration, may meet a reckoning at the ballot-box.

I would not have you understand that I am advocating peace at any price. If you will excuse a personal allusion, I will say that I have given nearly four of the best years of my life to active military service in the greatest war of modern times. I believe with

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\* Hon. James A. Tawney, Cong. Rec. Vol. 40, No. 128, p. 7311, May 19, 1906.

President Roosevelt, as expressed in his message already quoted, that there have been, and may be in the future, righteous wars, and I would, as he expressed it, "follow the path which leads towards righteousness, even though that path leads to war." But I also believe that in the present stage of the world's progress most wars may be avoided, and if the powerful nations will unite in compulsory arbitration, all aggressive wars may be prevented. I also believe that the measure next to, if not equal in importance with, compulsory arbitration, to secure the world's peace is the limitation and diminution of the armaments of the great powers.

I must not close without making reference to the dark shadow which has passed over our country since we last met. In the death of John Hay, secretary of state, peace and arbitration lost one of their stoutest and most influential champions. But the inspiration of his example and his words remain to strengthen our faith in the ultimate triumph of the cause so near his heart.

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